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Emotions and Civility: Everyday Talks about Politics with Rural Inhabitants of Southern Poland

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Abstract

Typical conversations about political matters are charged with emotion. Political matters are understood here as a thematic field involving talks about central authorities and parliament, as well as comments on news provided by the media. Talks about this topic often occur during neighborly meetings and family or social gatherings. I conducted ethnographic interviews to analyze how rural inhabitants talk about such political matters. During the interviews, especially polyphonic ones, I observed the accompanying emotions, such as raised voices, faces bloodshot with irritation, lively gestures, the use of irony, and sometimes vulgar language and swearing. Anger, resentment, anxiety, fear, contempt, hostility, and even hatred were unmistakable signals of emotional involvement in political matters and engagement in debate about the common good and public affairs. Thus, the question arises: are such conversations a form of civility?

1. Theoretical background and research questions

'Civility' is a fundamental notion in debates about civil society. Such debates have changed dynamically since antiquity, including during the Enlightenment, and have become revived in the time of the transformation of Eastern European countries. Currently, the idea of 'civil society' is transnational, universalized, and globalized (e.g. Balibar, 2009; Cohen and Arato, 1992; Dunn and Hann, 1996; Ekiert and Kubik, 1999; Gellner, 1991; Ferguson, 2007; Nash, 2007; Shils, 1997). Civility, however, remains an ambiguous notion, the interpretations of which have changed as dynamically as the interpretations of civil society. On the one hand, it relates to a feature of human behavior characterized by politeness, courtesy, and civilized conduct (e.g. Billante and Saunders, 2002); on the other, it denotes a civilized manner of engaging in public debate and acting for the common good (e.g. Shils, 1997). Moreover, civility refers to a form of involvement in common affairs that meets certain standards. Zizi Papacharissi proposed some standards of civility based on source material comprising online comments about political matters. She argued that we can talk about civility when we answer in the negative to three basic questions: 'Does the discussant verbalize the threat to democracy [...], Does the discussant assign stereotypes [...], and Does the discussant threaten others' individual rights?' (2004: 274). Of course, other plausible standards of assessment might be used to diagnose civility, but at the end of this article, I assess the civility demonstrated in the case interviews using Papacharizzi's standards.

   'Liberal civility' (Calhoun, 2000) in several theoretical approaches has been linked with the model of the 'rational citizen.' Marcus argued for opposing the terms 'rational citizen' and 'sentimental citizen' (Marcus, 2003). Agreeing with his critique of the rationalist approach, I do not plan to use the term sentimental citizen, which does not fit with my source material. However, at the turn of the twenty-first century, social anthropologists showed the inadequacy of the rational model for describing the complexity and dynamics of the contemporary processes of socio-political engagement; this is mainly because this model fails to acknowledge the key component of the public-political life: emotions (Aretxaga, 2003; Laszczkowski and Reeves, 2018; Lutz and Abu-Lughod, 1990; Navaro-Yashin, 2012; Stoler, 2004; and others). In this dichotomy ('emotional vs. rational') emotions have been typically characterized pejoratively and seen as 'inferior,' 'irrational,' 'substandard,' 'natural,' 'feminine,' and 'uncontrolled' (Lutz, 1986). Catherine Lutz and Geoffrey White have presented many theoretical approaches toward emotions, criticizing these simplifying oppositions (Lutz and White, 1986). For my purposes, the most important statement about emotions is captured in a quotation by Michelle Rosaldo: 'emotions are not things opposed to [...] thought so much as *embodied* thoughts, thoughts seeped with the apprehension that *I am involved*' (Rosaldo, 1984: 146). Emotions are thus a form and a proof of involvement; they are 'the expression of personal moral values' (Lutz, 1986) that generate the potential to mobilize social engagement; often, they bind people with very strong ties construing a 'community of feelings' (Berezin, 2001); in other situations, they polarize people who construct walls on opposite sides of the

political barricade. Emotions are 'socio-culturally constructed, dynamic, and interactive processes' (Boiger and Mesquita, 2014: 228); thus, they are dynamically changing and embedded in three contexts: 'in-the-moment interaction,' the social (relationships), and the cultural, and interplay dynamically among these contexts (Boiger and Mesquita, 2014). Emotions are 'expressed within and against the constraining and ordering framework of culture, history, and structure' (Lindholm, 2007: 44). The emotions that accompany everyday conversations and also our interviews about political matters are evoked and situationally shaped through real conversations with neighbors, cousins, or researchers; they are entangled in social relations and the positions of interlocutors; they take the form which is specific to the cultural context: in this case, defined by the rural character of the case study village and by the specificity of the highland region. They are evoked, shown, and transformed during the verbalization of personal convictions. Such convictions and imaginaries are thus embodied in these emotions.

These convictions and imaginaries are presented in very specific rough 'poetics' (Herzfeld, 2005) that enmesh heated emotions expressed in an impolite manner. Zizi Papacharissi, in distinguishing between 'politeness' and 'civility,' points to the danger of failing to notice the potential for 'civility' in discourses that employ impolite, rough rhetoric. She writes that 'we need to […] strive for a sense of civility that is acceptable across cultural terrains' (2004: 265). In her definition, civility 'focuses on respect for collective traditions of democracy' (2004: 270), but does not require correct, polite forms of discourse. From an analysis of online newsgroups, she shows that some published statements that do not meet the requirements of politeness retain the potential of civility. Thus, based on her assertion, I pose the following research question: do the narrative interviews – brimming with incorrect, indecent statements and heated emotions – have the potential for civility? Can this specific voice within the public debate – which is impolite, and thus uncivil – constitute a specific form of civility?

2. Research projects

I searched for answers to the former questions in the source materials of research projects implemented in the first decades of the twenty-first century with the following subjects: *Ethnopolitics – conversations about politics with highlanders* (1999–2001); *Imaginaries about the state, power, politics and democracy* (2004–2005); and *Ethnography of receiving media messages and the common knowledge* (2012–2014). I conducted these research projects in the villages of the southern part of the mountainous region of Podhale in Poland, and in a marketplace in the town of Nowy Targ (the name in Polish means 'New Market') at the foot of the Tatra Mountains in the Carpathians.

During one-week trips (four for each research project), together with three different groups of students I conducted and recorded ethnographic interviews that were later transcribed by students. The process of interviewing was accompanied by participant observations focused on expressed emotions. Interviews were recorded in country farmyards, next to shops, churches, but most

often at the town marketplace. They often took the form of polyphonic debates with 2–4 interlocutors, and it was especially those polyphonic talks in the town marketplace that frequently became very emotional. Approximately 380 interviews were recorded and transcribed during the first project (with the participation of 12 students), approximately 70 during the second, and around 90 during the third. The research directive differed slightly for each project, but generally we asked residents about voting preferences and the justifications thereof. In the years 1999–2001 and 2004–2005 the fieldwork disposition encouraged tracing local interpretations of terms such as power, nation, the state, politics, and democracy; it allowed researchers to present their political views in polyphonic talks in order to generate more of a sense of partnership and lively debates. In the years 2012–2014, the interviews were sometimes accompanied by shared TV watching and recording commentaries of TV and radio messages.

Our interlocutors during all the projects were randomly chosen inhabitants of the villages of the Nowy Targ district, aged 35–80; just over half of them were men, mostly Catholics. A majority had completed vocational education, while ca. 30 per cent had finished technical secondary education (only a few people had experienced higher education: the mayor, priest, teacher, and librarian). They often described themselves as 'farmers,' even if they had little land and had been forced to take up seasonal labor at home and abroad before and after the transformation. Most of them worked as seasonal labor migrants, very often as hired workers on construction sites.

The Nowy Targ basin at the foot of the mountains is a region with poor arable land, formerly impoverished. Because of the hindered development of farming, it has a centuries-old tradition of economic migration to other parts of the Habsburg Empire, and, since the turn of the twentieth century, to the United States. In the time of the People's Republic of Poland, large production facilities were built there (factories producing shoes, skiing equipment, sweets, and many other products) and a large state-owned tourist infrastructure was created, which provided the highlanders with additional employment. During the transformation period, the abolition of state factories and tourist infrastructure forced many citizens to migrate in search of work; this process intensified after Poland acceded to the EU. In comparison with the earlier, long-term migrations to the US (those that happened before WWII and continued during the times of the People's Republic), more recent journeys to EU countries have been frequent but usually short term. At the time of the research, especially the last project, the economy in the region was in much better shape than it was during the transformation, mainly due to remittances and profits from tourism (earned by private companies) connected to the vicinity of the mountains.

Anthropological publications about the Podhale region in the twenty-first century are mostly concerned with its folklore and cultural heritage, and focus on the higher parts of the Podhale region located around Zakopane – the 'Rocky Podhale' that is more interesting for tourists (for example: Kroh, 2002; Małanicz-Przybylska, 2017; Tylkowa, 2000). Anglophone anthropological publications that refer to fieldwork in the Nowy Targ district (the lower part of the Podhale region)

are limited to the works of Frances Pine, who has conducted ethnographic research in this area since 1978 (e.g. 1999, 2000, and 2002).

The villages around Nowy Targ are characterized by a preference for right-wing voting. Support for the right-wing party Law and Justice (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość,* or PiS) in parliamentary elections has steadily grown here since 2005.

Table 1. Voting results for the Nowy Targ district (% of votes). Data available on the State Electoral Commission website https://pkw.gov.pl.

Date	PIS	PO
2005	39,58	27,17
2007	51,94	31,62
2011	51,82	29,62
2015	59,45	14,73
2019	66,69	14,15

Support for PiS has grown at the cost of support for the more liberal party Civic Platform (*Platforma Obywatelska*, PO), even in the years 2007–2015 when the Civic Platform was the ruling party in Poland. Since 2015, Poland has been ruled by PiS, the party supported by most of our interlocutors.[1]

3. Forms of expressed emotion

The narrative interviews with village inhabitants were not calm exchanges of information, arguments, and points of view. We observed that the polyphonic conversations initiated by researchers conducted at the market and other meeting places were particularly dynamic and expressive acts. During these 'performances,' interlocutors presented their political convictions to an audience limited to two, three, or four individuals, including the researcher. Our interlocutors thus identified themselves emotionally with the expressed convictions, as embodied by raised voices, lively gestures, and vivid facial expressions. The expressed convictions also used local poetics or rhetoric characterized by specific words (frequently vulgar) and sarcasm or irony, and sometimes unusual semantic formations. Local poetics were intertwined with local imaginaries and viewed as an inseparable whole. In addition to the specific poetics, the language used in this region also posed a challenge. Our interlocutors spoke using a mix of Polish

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[1] Our interviewees were village inhabitants who only visited the market place in Nowy Targ, so they were a different social group than the one studied by Maciej Gdula (2018), who conducted his research project among PiS voters in a small Polish town.

characteristic of people with basic or vocational education and the local highlander dialect, employed especially often by older interlocutors. All interlocutors (excluding a few with higher education) also spoke using the intonation specific to highlanders. Of course, translation to English affects the linguistic specificity of the cited interlocutors that involved specific, local poetics and are full of meaningful expression in their Polish-language version. Poignant verbal forms were always accompanied by performatively expressed emotions.

The main focal point of the expressed aversion and even hate was 'politicians.' Our interlocutors used the term 'politicians' in reference to members of parliament and central government officials, not local authorities. They used this word as the symbolic personification of 'people of power,' and attributed it with many moral flaws, mainly being driven by a desire for self-enrichment. Anger is clearly recognizable in recorded declarations, such as: 'Mister, my blood boils when I talk about the government!'; 'I am so angry that I can barely speak!'; 'I can't listen to politics, it makes my blood curl!'; 'My pressure goes up to 220 if I do [talk about politics]'; 'It pisses me off!' Such statements, frequently vulgar, were reaffirmed by engaging the body: raised voices, sharp gestures, and faces red with irritation. Negative emotions were also revealed by the use of curses and swearwords aimed at politicians: 'sons of bitches,' 'fuckers,' 'bastards,' 'asses' (in Polish, the word for members of parliament – *posły* – sounds similar to the word denoting donkeys, *osły*). The vulgarity of the expressions was not only limited to nouns (forms of invective) used to characterize politicians, but also included verbs for describing their action. Most often, the verb 'fuck' in its various forms was used to describe the actions of politicians, accented by visible signs of irritation such as high-pitched voices, gestures, and blood-shot faces. Another expression of anger involved calling for the extermination of members of parliament, expressed in statements such as: 'They should die in gas chambers!', 'Someone should fly an airplane into them!', 'They should be hanged on trees!', 'Hitler should be unleashed on them!', and 'Here, in Podhale, if one of us highlanders saw one of them politicians, we would rip his guts out with a knife!' Proposals for eradicating MPs usually appeared in conversations when levels of irritation peaked; the interlocutors, with red faces, would shout their proposals, wave their arms, and frequently use gestures to demonstrate the proposed method of destroying the politicians. Such forms of expression often provoked the researchers to attempt to calm their interlocutors, which, however, incited the emotional flames even more. We often find that 'it is hard to accept that the results of agency and resistance are not always what we would like to see' (Pasieka, 2017: 28). About the situation of researchers during ethnographic research among right-wing radicals, see Pasieka (2017; 2019).

Another way of expressing aversion and irritation was the use of ironic comments, including expressions like 'Because we like Mister X very much!' (where X indicates the name of the disliked politician). Sometimes sarcasm took the shape of more complex statements, such as the assessment recorded in 2014 of the policies of the liberal party Civic Platform that was in power at the time, formulated by a man in his 40s (of vocational education): 'I might be abnormal

(weird)! Here, in Podhale, we have a "movement of abnormal," because what is normal in Poland now are lesbians, homos, and tax robbery. So, if this is normal, then we might as well be weird!' Such a statement constitutes both a criticism of fiscal policy and the changes in ethics and moral norms associated with the acceptance of sexual minorities. Thus, a mixture of economic and social commentary was combined with a potent addition of anger, which made the interlocutor boil and become almost uncontrollable. The irony in the statement 'we are abnormal' in a situation 'where this is normal,' supported by the shouting out of sentences, a hot-headed attitude, and sudden gestures involved an eruption of anger that was intimidating to the researcher, even though using sarcasm is locally considered a more diplomatic, courteous, and toned down means of expression. This is why irony was the rhetorical form frequently employed in conversations with researchers.

4. Sharing emotions collectively

It was obvious that, despite variety among the chosen forms of expression, irritation and aversion were emotions shared among many of the interlocutors from Nowy Targ. We were frequently surprised by the 'stereotypical set of emotions' (Leavitt, 1996) shown in talks about political matters. John Leavitt explains this phenomenon by observing that the bodily sphere is socio-culturally shaped while stressing that, during socialization, bodies – similarly to minds – undergo training and hence facilitate the collective dissemination of not only specific thoughts but also the emotional states that are signaled by bodily reactions (Leavitt, 1996). As previously mentioned in the introductory section, 'emotions occur in and are shaped by social and cultural contexts' (Boiger and Mequita, 2012: 228), and it is in these contexts that the embodiment of thought takes place. What is more, there is also a very interesting theoretical proposition concerning affect, which is seen as the 'virtual co-presence of potentials based on memory, experience, thought and habit' (Gibbs, 2014: 251) that is produced by different forms of familial and cultural socialization. From this perspective, 'emotion is a selective activation or expression of affect' (Gibbs, 2014: 251). The theory of affect stems theoretically from Spinoza, Tarde, Deleuze and Guattari. It subsequently inspired the concept of 'affective potentiality,' which can be 'discharged' or 'invoked,' for example, by the environment (Navaro-Yashin, 2012: 20), and take the shape of feelings expressed in various forms. Referring to this statement, I assume that the interview situations caused a discharge of affective potentiality that changed into emotions visible to the observer. However, if we want to thoroughly understand why certain content possesses the specific potential to evoke heated emotions, we must look at the imaginaries embodied in revealed emotions.

5. Post-peasant imaginaries

During our interviews in the Nowy Targ district, we observed that the most extreme emotions were evoked when the interviewee sought to communicate that

the actual political-economic reality diverges from locally accepted normative ideas about 'good governance' derived from rural concept of 'good farm management' (Dobrowolski, 1966). The larger the gap between the local 'social imaginaries' (Taylor, 2004) and the current situation, the greater the irritation, aversion, and resentment in the commentaries. To understand this reaction, an outline needs to be drawn of the 'good governance' to which interviewees refer. Normative ideas about 'good governance' stem from the multi-generational experience of organizing labor on the family farm, interpreted through the categories of traditional peasant culture, with the notable influence of the social doctrine of the Catholic Church (Malewska-Szałygin, 2011; 2017). These social imaginaries were revealed through comparing the state to a family agricultural farm, and the state authorities to the governor; the people to family, and the state to the farm (land) itself. This comparison summarizes and universalizes imaginaries about proper relations between work and property, governance and obligation, submission and domination. This normative model is traditional (in Weber's sense), and paternalistic and autocratic. Although the predecessors of our interlocutors were peasants, and our interlocutors were workers who owned only a small plot of land (but nonetheless called themselves 'farmers'), I call this normative pattern 'post-peasant' (the term also used by Buzalka, 2007). This normative pattern is contemporarily still employed to assess both past and present reality. The post-1989 political-economic reality in Poland has been shaped (to characterize this process in a vastly simplified manner) with the aim of implementing the ideals of liberal democracy and neoliberal capitalism. Such ideas, however, quite starkly differ from post-peasant norms. The disparity between the two models consequently encompasses ideological and affective differences. The resulting tension between them causes emotions to escalate. Local affective potentiality, strongly tied up with the post-peasant normative pattern, thus becomes invoked through reports about how reality is being shaped in a liberal direction, which is considered undesirable by the interlocutors.

6. Topics that especially evoke emotions

Looking at the topics of interviews that evoked the liveliest emotional reactions, even in the first years of the twenty-first century particularly strong emotions were still being evoked in commentary about property transformations. In the second decade of the twenty-first century, the strongest emotions were associated with content related to ongoing ethical and moral social changes.

6.1 The process of privatization

The period of transformation was characterized (again, broadly simplified) by the conversion of state property into private property. This process did not encompass small family farms in Podhale that had never been nationalized; it did, however, cover industrial facilities, tourist infrastructure, and state-owned buildings. In assessments of the situation of the transformation of the economic system through the lens of the post-peasant normative pattern, interlocutors from the Nowy Targ district interpreted it as 'selling out to others the national wealth that the Polish people had worked on [worked to create].' When asked to explain the term 'others,' the former replied that they meant 'other nations.' Upon further questioning, however, they answered 'like Germans and Jews.' Accusations about 'selling the national wealth' became tied to vividly expressed outrage directed at policymakers. In the local perspective, privatization activities, both legal and illegal, were commonly referred to as theft. Interjections such as 'Thieves! Nothing but thieves! I can't bear to even look at them!'; 'They are not afraid of anyone! People or God!'; 'There is a commandment: thou shall not steal, and they steal all the time! They have no conscience!' were accompanied by waving arms and faces purple with anger. The property transformations related to the post-peasant normative pattern were understood as theft; namely, as a breach of one of the sacred commandments and human laws; an attack on the stable, divinely-sanctioned social order, which, of course, led to outcries of outrage and anger. The bitterness visible in the accusations of theft was even more acute considering that, in the words of our interlocutors 'If I steal a watch from someone, it is a sin and law-breaking, and I can go to prison. But they steal houses, hotels, factories, and for them, the law is different. And you don't see them doing time!' The feeling of injustice due to inequality before the law generated immense irritation that was subsequently presented in utterances that were full of hate. The perceived injustices caused outrage when they were identified with the governance of a traditional farm; when observed on the macro-scale of the entire state (imagined as a great national farm), they evoked even stronger feelings.

6.2 Redistribution of public funds

Another area of injustice that evoked resentment was the great disparity in the redistribution of public money. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the media provided information about the public resources distributed by state institutions among various social groups. From the media news, our interlocutors could find out that the earnings of MPs or government officials paid from the state budget were many times higher than their pensions or disability benefits. Immense inequalities in the distribution of public assets caused anger, expressed in statements such as the following: 'To become a politician is to be at the top of the pecking order: the money they have is fantastic!'; 'How much money do they take [spend] in that parliament of theirs! – and me? My pension is like a starvation wage!'; 'They are milking us dry during this transformation.' The feeling of

injustice and the outrage connected to it becomes understandable when we relate the situations thus described to post-peasant normative patterns. On a traditional agricultural farm, when farm workers were hired, it was obligatory to pay them justly; that is, a living wage (Dobrowolski, 1966; Thomas and Znaniecki, 1918). Paying out disability benefits or pensions insufficient for survival (and such were the amounts paid out during the 1990s; at the beginning of the twenty-first century the situation improved) was seen as an injustice and a fundamental aberration in terms of the correct governance of shared funds.

6.3 Liquidation of the footwear factory

A particularly emotional and widely commented-on experience was the 1990 bankruptcy of the state-owned Nowy Targ Leather Industry Combine. 'Podhale' was founded in 1955 and employed about 9,000 workers from Nowy Targ and Podhale villages in the 1960s and 1970s, producing up to nine million pairs of shoes annually. Stories about the liquidation of the huge factory were charged with despair, as expressed in the following words: 'They allowed the combine to collapse! So many people worked there! Everyone was left jobless!'; 'In the combine, people worked on 24 conveyor belts, on two shifts! In the company that makes shoes now, there are two belts! Almost the entire crew had to fuck off abroad! And the factory itself – it was the leading [one of its] kind!' I was particularly moved by the painful memories of one of the workers at the combine: 'I was working at the time when they shut down the combine. It was so stressful for the workers that you couldn't imagine. One's hair would go white, you wanted to just hang yourself. I worked in the combine for 18 years! When they told us that it was over, I lay down in the locker room on a bench and my legs became paralyzed. I couldn't stand up because of the stress.' This grief and resentment were caused, as the interlocutor explained, by the 'wasteful governing' of the government. Use of this expression relates to the normative understanding of 'good governance.' Thus, concerning this pattern, privatization was considered a sign of the immense wastefulness of central authorities.

In contrast to the closure of the combine, processes of privatization on the national scale did not evoke nostalgia or sadness, but rather rage expressed by gestures, facial expressions, and vocal intonation accompanied by bitter words: 'They have sold Poland!'; 'Fifty years we'd worked, and today everything has been sold for petty cash!'; 'They are selling our property to make Poles into slaves for other nations!'; 'Nobody knows who they are selling it to, but it belonged to every one of us!'; 'They have hardly anything to rule over, they sold everything to others!'; 'They serve foreign interests, they don't care about Poland!'; 'It's a disaster! They closed and sold everything!'; 'Is it normal to sell Polish soil to others?! Or factories?! They're selling everything to foreigners!' The transcripts of interviews we collected are filled with such expressions. One can hear in them the accusation that Polish national interests have been betrayed. Many of those accusations, expressed in the interviews from the beginning of the twenty-first century, were aimed directly at professor Leszek Balcerowicz, the Minister of

Finance who directed the processes of privatization in the 1990s. These processes were locally understood as 'selling out the national wealth,' and seen as high treason: a betrayal of the nation understood in ideal terms and imagined based on the highlander's extended family values. To betray a family by selling one's family farmland – inherited through the family for centuries – was considered a tragedy, and the final ruin of one's lineage (Dobrowolski, 1966; Thomas and Znaniecki, 1918). In conjunction with the post-peasant normative pattern, it explains the immensity of desperation and accusations of betrayal that accompanied conversations about the national-scale privatization process.

Anger and resentment continued to be expressed in our interviews in 2012–2014, when a very aggressive and vulgar tone was employed when speaking about the leader of the Civic Platform (the ruling party at the time) who was prime minister (2007–2014). The latter was accused of being responsible for continuing privatization; the privatization of the health service and energy services elicited particularly strong outrage. With loud shouting, accusations were made that the leader was serving the interests of the German economy. The fact that he is Kashubian in origin (Kaszuby is an area in northern Poland which was historically under Prussian occupation), tied him, in the interlocutors' imaginaries, to the German government. The act of treason of which he was accused in the conversations evoked heated emotions, performatively played out in sharp, vulgar words, hateful gazes, raised voices and gestures revealing extreme outrage.

When assessing the function played by such emotions, there is a need to highlight their bonding potential. Shared feelings of outrage, bitterness, and anxiety created strong ties in the community, which had experienced the process of privatization in a similar way. The stimulatory function of this was visible in the incitement of local interlocutors to action; namely, to participate in elections and vote for a right-wing party, and to vivid, emotional, and engaged advocacy for PiS, which was perceived of as party that would block the privatization processes and be more congruent with the post-peasant normative pattern and the associated post-peasant affective potentiality.

6.4 Morality changes perceived as novelties

A prominent topic in the interviews undertaken in the years 2012–2014 was the problem of changes in the ethical and moral order. Of course, morality is a very dynamic and multidimensional socio-cultural process (Csordas, 2013), but our interlocutors perceived and articulated these developments as a moment of clear change. They intensively criticized Pride Parades and the various forms of expression of sexual diversity and its acceptance, clearly contrasting them with what they called 'normality' or 'nature.' It was argued with intense engagement that such things '[are] against nature!' This statement was frequently supported with examples from animal life, involving pointing to the differences in the sexes necessary for breeding purposes. What was surprising was that even though these topics were very irritating to the interlocutors, they limited their forms of expression, for example, by abstaining from using vulgar language. This was not,

however, because of political correctness – Nowy Targ's village interlocutors were far from concerned with this. Such changes in accepted customs were considered extremely upsetting, but how this was expressed was mitigated because sexuality in village conversations has typically involved indistinct references, irony, and joking suggestions. Sexual matters have been considered inappropriate for public discussion. For this reason, few vulgar descriptions were used for sexual minorities; instead, local verbal constructs were more frequently used, such as *seksualiści* ('sexuals,' not 'homosexuals') as a description for sexually non-normative people.

Changes in the ethical and moral order were considered as interfering with the world order, which was associated with the traditional peasant worldview (Dobrowolski, 1966; Thomas and Znaniecki, 1918-1920, and others) and to the concept of the consolidated order of the universe as understood from the Bible, passed down by generations of village parish priests, and along intergenerational family lines. Undermining this legitimized, sacred order was considered a sign of oncoming doomsday, and was supported by the quotation of prophecies that circulated around the village in hand-written copies. Lifestyle changes seen from this perspective caused concerns about 'divine retribution.' Attacking the foundations of the world order – as news media about Pride Parades were interpreted as doing – was also connected politically to liberals. The feeling of dread stimulated our interlocutors to take action: during subsequent elections, they mostly voted against liberal parties, raising support for their right-wing opponents. These shared concerns strongly consolidated the community, worried about upsetting the foundations of traditional morality.

6.5 Affective epidemics

Some of the media messages that reached the inhabitants of the villages of the Nowy Targ district caused 'affective epidemics' (Gibbs, 2014); namely, rapidly spreading emotional reactions to content and images shown in the media. An example of this is the affective epidemic that was caused by the so-called 'apple scandal' in 2014. In spring 2014, after the Russian aggression in Eastern Ukraine, the Polish government declared support for Ukraine, which resulted in Russian sanctions limiting the purchases of grocery products, specifically apples from Polish orchards. This event was widely commented on in the villages in the district and assessed very critically. The apple scandal caused a feeling of anxiety, which our interlocutors justified by referring to common-sense based on a process of 'typification' (Berger and Luckman, 1966). Referring to national stereotypes, they argued that Ukrainians do not deserve Polish support or solidarity because, according to local knowledge about the past conveyed in families, they had often been brutal and aggressive to Poles. Russia, in turn, was called 'Poland's sworn enemy' and Russians 'Asian barbarians,' thus portrayed as a dangerous and vast foe – dangerous due to its lack of respect for the diplomatic rules of international relations. The fear of Russian sanctions spread quickly and widely, taking over the imagination of our interlocutors. Why was it that particular piece of news that

electrified public opinion to such an extent? First, the apple scandal was connected to matters of the economy, which were always considered a priority by our interlocutors. Second, it directly affected small-scale entrepreneurs (orchard owners) but not the big financial players, which our interlocutors did not identify with. Third, it activated previous cognitive categories – namely, stereotypes; at the same time discharging an affective potentiality indissolubly tied up with these. The effect that ensued was a large eruption of anxiety. Considering that the ruling party of the time was the Civic Platform, one cannot exclude that it was this anxiety that pushed the interlocutors to participate in large numbers in the electoral elections of 2015 and to vote for the right-wing party, PIS.

6.6 Hidden strategies of media producers

Immense emotional reactions were also provoked by that which was locally referred to as 'speaking untruth.' The expression was used to describe the discrepancy between media messages and interlocutors' own experiences, as well as the opinions hammered out between families, friends, and neighbors. It is obvious to social scientists that the media produce 'mediascapes'; namely, 'image-centric, narrative relations of […] fragments of reality, produced by private or public companies' (Appadurai, 1996: 34). Mediascapes, cautiously constructed to create 'an impression of objectivity' or 'the illusion of bedrock factuality' (Herzfeld, 2001: 295), promote the 'strategies of producers' (Certeau, 1988: XXIV). The titles of Polish news programs such as *Wydarzenia* (Events) or *Fakty* (Facts) serve to create the illusion of a full reference to demonstrable reality. The interlocutors, without delving into complex argumentation, summarized the issue of mediascapes and the strategies of producers with a succinct, angry contention: namely, that 'the media are lying.' This conclusion was usually associated with all forms of media, except those that were trusted. 'The social production of mistrust is based on specific practices that necessarily stem from past negative experiences, which are reactivated in the present through the group's collective memory' (Giordano and Kostova, 2002: 75). A feeling of being lied to greatly irritated our interlocutors.

The strategies of media producers which caused irritation were confronted with our interlocutors' own 'tactics' (Certeau, 1988), captured in statements such as 'you always have to approach what the media is saying with common sense'; 'Old folks that have been through war and what came after, they know. We only have what we hear on the TV'; 'TV can't be trusted, you have to listen to the old folks, to what they are saying.' The tactics referred to imaginaries about the past adopted from the stories of close ones, mainly the elderly; however, they were often supplemented with information obtained from the one media source that was trusted and considered as somewhat of a friend (in the case of older people, this was typically *Radio Maryja*,[2] while the younger ones would refer to their favorite

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[2] Radio Maryja – a Polish Catholic radio station founded on December 8, 1991 in Toruń by members of the Congregation of the Holy Redeemer (Redemptorists). It is the largest religious broadcasting station in Poland, and is very popular among the elderly Nowy Targ district interlocutors we

news program). The information obtained from such sources was subsequently used to construct a kind of a local 'verification apparatus' (Malewska-Szałygin, 2018): a common-sense heterogenic conglomerate of prior categories obtained from one's own and one's family multi-generational experiences, and from the teachings of rural parish priests, mixed with fragmented primary-school knowledge. This cognitive instrument was used as a filter for media news through which the receiver could critically assess the received information. The verification of this, expressed in words ('the press is lying, the TV is lying, everyone is lying!') evoked extreme emotions of outrage and anger, and even a feeling of degradation. The media 'lies' were considered unjust and, what is worse, a sign of contempt for an audience considered to be so naive and stupid that they were easy to deceive. In a situation in which this deception was related to an entire vision of economic-political reality, it was considered particularly malicious, humiliating, and undignified to the spectator/listener, which in turn caused anger and provoked sharp, aggressive responses accompanied by aggressive body language.

7. Emotional barriers destroying public debate

Emotions accompanying conversations about political matters revealed bitterness and anxiety aimed at the transformative and post-transformative change, and criticism and anger towards 'politicians' (MPs and central authorities, especially those connected to the liberal party). This attitude resulted in emotional engagement with right-wing party involvement and a distrust of liberal media, which were 'irritating' to the majority of our interlocutors. Among the elderly interviewees, the most popular media platform was the Catholic Radio Maryja and its sister television station Trwam (*Abide*), supplemented of course by the main program of the public, state-owned, main Polish television station, TVP 1. Middle-aged media consumers generally watched TVP 1; some of them turned to TV Polsat, a commercial, primarily entertainment-oriented TV station. Very few of our interlocutors declared that they watched TVN, the liberal commercial TV. Radio broadcasts were listened to mainly at work (manual labor); stations included the main, state-owned channel Program 1. In addition to Polish state radio, a particularly popular choice was the local commercial radio station Radio Alex, heard very often on local buses. During the years 2012–2014, when the third research project was conducted, the main TV and radio stations (TVP 1, Polish Radio Program 1) presented the ideological line of the liberal party that was in power at the time. Distrust and irritation towards this led our interlocutors to avoid the media, which they accused of 'messing with their heads' or 'brainwashing people.' As a result, the majority of interlocutors would watch or listen to only one TV or radio station, thus wrapping themselves in an information-interpretation bubble, produced by, for example, Radio Maryja. The lack of trust in other media outlets, strengthened by an aversion towards them,

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interviewed for the 2012–2014 research project. Sociological research on *Radio Maryja* has been summarized in a book by Ireneusz Krzemiński (2009).

blocked out contact with media that offered alternative political options, cutting off the stream of alternative interpretations of reality. Listeners of the station Radio Maryja shared the rhetoric that this station was using (absorbing it to a greater or lesser extent), its interpretations of published news, and the level of emotional charge intimated as appropriate by the producer. This situation was conducive to the closing up of groups with similar political views; the latter became surrounded by emotional barriers that prevented the potential influence of other opinions. This made it functionally impossible to exchange arguments and engage in constructive discussion.

Emotions that I typically associate with revolutionary zeal and the drive to cause a change in this case served to stabilize (entrench) political views, and to strengthen the barriers between people with different views. Emotions thus strengthened individual and group political convictions and prevented their potential modification. A shared sense of resentment, outrage, and irritation caused by transformation processes, parades for equality, economic scandals, and the untrustworthiness of the media solidified jointly shared convictions and shared affective potentiality. Few individuals were ready to break out – all the more since they shared the same affective potentiality. Such a change in convictions would mean locating themselves outside the community of feelings.

Peer pressure was also complemented by contempt for people whose political convictions had changed, as transpired from our conversations. Such people were referred to with disapproval: '*kurek na kościele*' (as changeable as a weathercock), or as '*farbowany lisek*' (dyed foxes, i.e. double-dealers). When talking about the activists from the peasant party PSL (Polish People's Party) who had changed allegiance from the communist peasant party ZSL (United People's Party), our interviewees said that they are 'like watermelons: green on the outside, but red on the inside,' expressing disapproval at such changes in political views with gestures and facial expressions. A social reluctance to change one's convictions was the reason that interlocutors would very rarely and only reluctantly admit to any evolution in their views. The problem with this process was not the content of argumentation, which was considered and modified through rational discussion. The factor that motivated interviewees' conviction was emotion. Therefore, mutually shared anger, outrage, and sometimes anxiety and sadness were what made political convictions increasingly more hermetic, preventing views from evolving and blocking openness towards other opinions, and consequently making public debate impossible.

8. Disrespectful civility?

In this paper, I have described the eruptions of emotions observed in interviews with village inhabitants of the Nowy Targ district. Vulgar language, irony and irritation; purple faces which expressed anger, contempt, and sometimes sadness and anguish; and raised voices shouting invective accompanied conversations about political matters. I have listed the topics that evoked such strong emotions: the process of privatization (especially the liquidation of the footwear factory in

Nowy Targ), the redistribution of public funds, changes in morality perceived as novelties, the 'apple scandal' interpreted as involving national stereotypes, and a 'lying media' involving the hidden strategies of media producers. I have also described the two opposite functions of the emotions that we observed: on the one hand, helping create strong bonds in communities with similar ideas and feelings, but on the other, strengthening the barriers between groups with different convictions.

In order to explain the local point of view that such ideas stem from, I have shown that local imaginaries and affective potentiality are indissolubly tied up with the post-peasant normative pattern. The post-peasant normative formula makes it possible to understand local thoughts and the emotions that embody them. This perspective also shapes the specific poetics of rural talk about political matters, which certainly do not meet the requirements of politeness. The question is, do they also deny the requirements of civility?

Judging from the perspective of Zizi Papacharissi's standards of civility, the attitude of village inhabitants does not meet liberal democratic standards because it refers to another normative model derived from farm management experiences and farm work organization. Consequently, we can say that the latter approach 'focuses on [...] respect for [...] collective tradition' (Papacharissi, 2004: 270), but that this is not the 'tradition of democracy' (ibid.). Proposals to exterminate MPs, which sound like 'threats to others' individual rights' (ibid.) should not, however, be taken literally, but rather as a form of expressing the emotional commitment of the speakers through specific poetics. The rough and non-democratic forms of expression of our interlocutors fail to meet Papacharissi's standards of civility. The incivility of the observed form of local discourse is obvious – the form of expression is certainly 'disrespectful' (Coe et al., 2014), but it still carries with it the potential for commitment to the common good. Thus, what should we call this uncivil form of discursive and emotional involvement that is connected to the post-peasant normative pattern, with its attendant consequences in terms of different expectations and electoral preferences? Is it a rough form of civility? I think that calling this form of involvement 'civility' is problematic, but it certainly has an alternative, but politically important, discursive and affective potential. The increase in support for the PiS party in the region (as previously shown in Table 1) shows that this impolite potential can be mobilized and utilized politically.

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